

Last Year I Tried 57 Different Meditations – Here Is What I Learned

Believe it or not, there are hundreds of [different types of meditation](#) – just like there are many different types of *sports*. Last year (2015) I decided to systematically try multiple techniques, and in this post I'm sharing what I learned from these private experiments.

I haven't seen anyone write about experiments like this – at least not to this extent – so I'm pretty excited to share it.

The goals in running these experiments were three:

- To develop a wider understanding and experience of meditation practice as a whole
- To be better able to answer my readers questions when they ask about other types of meditation practices
- To potentially find better ways to meditate, or find good support practices, or perhaps discover a new favorite technique

This is **NOT a post for beginners**. If you are a beginner looking to read about the main types of meditation in order to decide which one to start, read [this](#) and [this](#) instead. Or check out my [Beginners Meditation Course](#).

Many of the techniques I explored may be perceived as “esoteric” and “obscure” by the majority of people interested in this topic. So I was unsure whether I should publish this or not, thinking that only 20-30 people might be interested in this level of detail. But, considering that long-term meditators and spiritually-inclined readers would possibly enjoy it, I decided to write it.

Let's get started!

My Meditation Experiments



I wanted to experiment with new practices without losing focus on my own practice. So what I did was to keep my main meditation the same (a long session each morning), and try different techniques at night, in shorter sessions (20min).

My aim was to try every technique for 3-7 days. But when I sensed a technique really wasn't for me, I only did it for a day or two. In total I tried 57 practices, 18 of which I really enjoyed.

Apart from one experiment, all these techniques were types of *focused attention* meditation (concentration). You can read more about the three major categories of meditation [here](#). **Focused attention** is the most common type, and also the one I recommend for almost everybody.

As to the techniques I used, most came from the Hindu tradition – more specifically, from two Yogic texts:

- Vijñānabhairava Tantra ([book](#), [online](#))
- Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali ([book](#), [online](#))

The choice was simply a personal predilection. I also tried some Buddhist meditations from the Theravada tradition.

What I learned

Here are some of the lessons I learned in this process. Some of these are rather technical aspects of concentration meditation.

These insights are presented here in a condensed form. Yet some of them are so important that I may write a whole post on it in the future.

1. There are many doors to stillness

Each of these practices is a door to stillness. You can experience peace, bliss, freedom, centeredness, and greater control of your mind, through many of the different techniques.

Different practices were created to suit the needs of different people, based on their temperament, beliefs, and level of maturity in the path. So there is nothing wrong in experimenting with several options until you find the one that works best for you. Once you find one, however, stick to it and deepen in it.

In focused attention meditation, the goal is always the same: to keep the mind continuously focused on the same object. This object can be:

- A **sensation**, such as
 - the movement of your breath (*vipassana*, *samatha*)
 - the movement in your body (movement meditation, [walking meditation](#));
 - the feeling of pain
- A **spot** in your body, such as the
 - the *heart center* in the middle of the chest,
 - the point in between the eyebrows (“third eye”)
 - the fontanelle in the crown of the head
 - the solar plexus
 - the tip of your nose
- A **feeling**, for example
 - loving-kindness
 - compassion
 - equanimity
 - bliss
 - God’s love
- A word or **mantra**
- A contemplation of an abstract **concept**, spiritual principle, or phenomena, such as
 - the emptiness of the body and the five senses

- a bottomless well
- the whole universe dissolving into pure consciousness
- the oneness of your body and the universe
- every sensation being a vibration of pure consciousness
- subject and object being one and the same
- the relationship between your body and space
- the lightness of a feather
- the mind's luminosity/purity
- A **virtue** or characteristic, such as
 - strength
 - contentment
 - non-attachment
 - stillness/tranquility
- A **visualized** object, such as
 - the form of your body
 - pure light
 - a spiritual image
 - (basically anything!)
- A **mental perception**, such as
 - moments of time and its sequence
 - noting whatever arises in consciousness in the present moment (mindfulness, Mahasi noting)
 - the influx of perceptions from one of the five senses
 - the sense of "I" or "I am" (self-enquiry)

Any object can work for you. You may need to try a few and see on what your mind most naturally settles on.

In a sense, the object of concentration is irrelevant – it is the process of mastering the movement of your attention that counts. On the other hand, the mind does absorb the

qualities of that which it contemplates constantly – so choose an object that is positive ([sattvic](#)), pleasing and calming.

Your mind absorbs the qualities of that which it contemplates constantly.

Once concentration on an object is mastered, objectless concentration can be successfully attempted. In the objectless concentration there is absence of distraction, absence of thoughts, with no focus on anything in particular. Just open awareness – like two empty mirrors perfectly facing each other.

2. You get intimate knowledge of your meditation object

In order to know anything, we need to give our attention to it. If while reading these words you are not paying attention to your breath, then your breath doesn't exist as an object in your consciousness – you don't know of it. The moment you pay attention to it, it suddenly exists again.

When you train the mind to pay attention continuously to the same object (such as your breath), that object becomes more *alive* and *vibrant*. It's as if attention charges it with life and energy. You get to know it more intimately – from the inside.

The longer you spend time with an object, the easier you can evoke its presence in your mind. For instance, if your object of concentration is *the lightness of a feather*, with time you acquire the ability to bring that object into your consciousness very quickly and strongly, so that your whole being is filled with it. You *become* the lightness of a feather.

That is one of the reasons why I enjoyed meditating on the concept of emptiness, or void. It is highly soothing and liberating. In one of the meditations I had to focus on the body being made of emptiness, and the “void in one's body extending in all directions simultaneously”. When it deepens, this gives a delicious feeling of limitlessness and fearlessness.

3. It is easier to keep your focus with more dynamic and “tangible” objects

If your object of meditation is your breathing, then there is a natural *rhythm* for your attention. Every breath is a reminder that you should be paying attention to your breathing. The same thing happens in *mantra meditation*, especially if the mantra is repeated in a constant rhythm.

Other objects of meditation – like focusing your attention on the third eye, on a visualisation, or on a concept – are harder for the beginner to work with, because they are more constant. There is little to no change in it. So your attention easily becomes bored with that object, or blind to its presence. Before you know it, it has wandered elsewhere.

That is why I feel that, for most people, breathing awareness and mantra meditation are the best ways to start developing serious concentration.

For similar reasons, the more tangible and concrete an object is, the easier it is to focus on it. Once you develop the skill to keep the focus on grosser objects (such as your body, your breath, or a sound), you can then move on to subtler objects of focus. The subtlest ones would be emptiness, consciousness itself, and nothingness.

To illustrate this point, when practicing mantra meditation (or *japa*) there is a natural progression where at the first stage of practice, the meditator is actually whispering the mantra. Once that becomes easy, he then moves on to mentally repeating the mantra. After a long practice in this stage, the mantra starts to *repeat itself*, and the meditator is just “listening” for it – but there are no breaks of attention, and the rhythm is steady.

And in the final stage, the mantra disappears, and is not replaced by thinking – there is only silence. At this point, the mantra has fulfilled its purpose.

4. You can create any feeling you like

Everything we do in our life is for the sake of experiencing something – a certain **feeling** or **state** – usually “happiness”. Even the acquisition of material things, fame, beauty and the achievement of goals... we only seek these because we desire to experience the *feeling* we will have once we get these things. We seek external things to produce internal states.

Some of the techniques I experimented with involved generating a certain feeling inside myself – such as loving-kindness, bliss, satisfaction, stillness – and focusing on it continuously. And what became crystal clear for me, in doing this process, is this: **you don't need any external condition in order to produce an internal state.**

This may be hard to understand, especially if you haven't tried meditations like this. But it's something you can discover and experience for yourself.

In other words, you are able to experience deep joy right now without needing to change anything in your life. All you have to do is kindle the flame of that emotion – through memory or imagination – and then *meditate* on it. Focus on it, give it all your attention. That joy will then grow and fill your mind. And it will be purer and more solid than the joy that is triggered by external life conditions.

The same is true if you want to feel peace, fearlessness, confidence, love, etc. Or if you want to develop any quality, like willpower, patience, grit, self-acceptance, etc.

Your mind is capable of giving you anything you want, without needing an external stimuli for it. All you need to do is to learn how to use it.

So while you cannot just focus on having wealth and expect to win the lottery, you **can** focus on the *feeling of abundance* and experience it in a very real and solid way.

It is not the easiest way. But it's the most direct, most powerful, and most dependable.

5. Physical props will only take you so far

I tried binaural beats, and didn't like it much. Yet I understand it can be a useful way of *relaxing*.

Using physical props for meditation – like a sound (binaural beats for example) or an object (like a candle) – can be useful in the first months. But once your concentration deepens you will need to let go of that. The focus then becomes more internal.

6. It's possible to get sick of happiness

One of the tantric meditations I did was to focus the mind on “moments of great delight”.

On the first day of this practice, I experienced an overwhelming feeling of delight, happiness or joy. I also understood better what delight or joy really is. It's basically a fulfilment of a desire or aspiration. There is the feeling of an expansion in the heart, and a unification of consciousness in the brain, with “fireworks” of emotion.

On the following day I tried doing the “great delight” meditation again, but just couldn't. I felt no inclination to feel delight or happiness anymore. It felt like taking another bite of an extremely sweet cake, right after having eaten enough of it.

So instead I did another tantric meditation that suggested to focus on the feeling of *satisfaction*. With this I understood that satisfaction and delight are two different things.

Delight is more like an explosion, like fireworks in the brain and butterflies in the heart; and it's usually related to the fulfilment of a desire. Satisfaction, on the other hand, is like a calm feeling of contentment about oneself or one's life; it is calm, expansive, and balanced.

Meditating on your emotions, thoughts and feelings is a great way to understand them better.

7. Pain is not that painful

One of the tantric meditations was to concentrate on pain. For that I needed a constant feeling of pain, so I could “study” it. So I placed a couple of metal paper clips ([like so](#)) pressing the tip of my skin. Sometimes the pain was dull; at other times it was sharp.

This meditation made me realize that pain is just another bodily sensation. The most painful thing is not the sensation itself – but the impulse to stop it. The moment I accepted pain as just another sensation, and let go of the aversion towards it, I was no longer suffering the pain.

If you can let go of the aversion, pain is not so painful anymore.

8. Contemplating the infinite and formless will set you free

Some meditations invite you to contemplate something infinite, like the universe, or something formless, such as consciousness or emptiness. Here are some examples from the ones I did:

- Contemplate that “I’m not my body – I exist everywhere”
- Concentrate on one’s own self as a vast unlimited expanse
- Concentrate on the idea that the universe is void
- Meditate on the empty space within a cup
- Focus on the space between two thoughts
- Contemplate that the same consciousness exists inside all bodies
- Concentrate on consciousness as omnipresent and free of all limitations
- Contemplate on the whole universe having the reality of a dream

All these practices helped me quickly bring my mind to a state of expansive stillness. The limited ego and all its petty problems are blissfully left behind for that time being.

9. Meditating on TIME was a surprise

The Yoga Sutras speak of meditating on the *moment and its sequence* (Chap. III, verse 53). This sounds highly abstract. Seriously, how to focus on the *moment* itself?

To my surprise, this meditation went very deep for me, and it was highly insightful. My mind got focused and quiet with ease.

I practiced this in two slightly different ways.

The **first** was as in *exploring the nature of this moment*. With this exploration there was a dropping into the ground of being – the timeless and move-less nature behind all that moves.

Every time my mind settled on something as its object of meditation (“this is the instant!”) it was immediately seen that the instant was not the smallest unit of time – that it could still be delved deeper. Since *this instant* is infinitely small, **it cannot be found**; in this process of searching for it, the mind gets infinitely subtle, selfless, and laser-focused. It’s as though the task is so overwhelming that the whole of your attention is used – and there is nothing for it to grasp on to.

The second was by focusing on the *sequence of moments* of time. This resulted in an insight that all phenomena is constantly moving, fleeting, unstable. The deep impermanence and dynamism of all things was experimented at a whole new level.

10. “OM” is *not* just another sound

I had tried [mantra meditation](#) before, with different *mantras*. But when I tried with OM, something was very different for me. I understood why this sound was so much praised by the ancient Yogis. It is suggested in the Yoga Sutras (I, 28).

I practiced repeating oooooooooommmmmmmmmmm inside my mind, focusing all my attention on this sound, and with a feeling of openness and reverence. As the mind got quieter, the “om” got longer. Conversely, the longer I drew out each *om*, the quieter the mind became.

There was also a feeling of intensity in the center of the brain, as if it was charging up and calming down at the same time. It’s hard to explain – you have got to try a few times for yourself, and then see how you feel.

Techniques I loved

The main technique of my own personal practice involves focusing on the heart center in the body, and just keeping the mind there. Here is a list of some other meditation objects that I personally enjoyed focusing on, and that I'm considering doing as an alternative practice, or as a support to my current practice.

I had good results focusing on:

- loving-kindness [Buddhist]
- the OM mantra [Yogic]
- the 6th *chakra* (the space between the eyebrows, or "third eye") [Yogic]
- the 7th *chakra* (the fontanelle) [Yogic]
- an infinite expanse of light in the heart center [Yogic]
- the visual form of my body [Yogic]
- the lightness of cotton [Yogic]
- the relationship between my body and the space around it [Yogic]
- the moments of time and its sequence [Yogic]
- the void of the five senses, in the heart [Tantric]
- the void of your body, extending in all directions simultaneously [Tantric]
- listening to the internal sound of the body [Tantric]
- the idea of the whole universe dissolving into pure consciousness [Tantric]
- the feeling of me existing everywhere, without limits [Tantric]
- the perception of the whole universe being like a dream [Tantric]

Final thoughts

That's it! I am not sure how many people will be interested in this depth of detail, but I had to get these learnings out of my head. If you got something from this post, I'd like to hear your thoughts in the **comments** section.

If you are already part of my mailing list, don't worry, no duplicate messages will ever be sent.]

May this post inspire your own experiments with meditation!

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